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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1130
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 3936
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 1146
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 3020
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 7803
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5460
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0274
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
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RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 2156
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000899

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS AND PM
MCC FOR D NASSIRY AND E BURKE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: POLICE ARREST SUSPECTED ABDUCTIONS
CULPRIT

REF: A. COLOMBO 805
[1](#)B. COLOMBO 861
[1](#)C. COLOMBO 809
[1](#)D. COLOMBO 820
[1](#)E. COLOMBO 824
[1](#)F. COLOMBO 170

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4(b,d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: On June 21, a special unit of the Police Department's Criminal Investigation Unit (CID) arrested former Air Force Squadron Leader Nishantha Gajanayake in connection with an ongoing probe into abductions, extortion and extra-judicial killings. Among other crimes, Gajanayake is alleged to have arranged the abduction and killing of two Tamil Red Cross employees on June 1 (ref A). However, Gajanayake's arrest is mired in political controversy. On June 18, the United National Party (UNP) filed a no confidence motion with the Speaker of Parliament alleging that Defense Spokesman Keheliya Rambukwella deliberately misled Parliament when he said that Tamils evicted from Colombo had left voluntarily (ref C, D). The ruling Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) counter-attacked by filing its own no-confidence motion with the Speaker on June 20 against UNP parliamentarian Lakshman Seneviratne, in part for his explosive allegations that Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa was organizing abductions and using Gajanayake as his point of contact with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam-breakaway Karuna faction (ref B). Now that the CID has arrested Gajanayake on charges similar to Seneviratne's allegations in Parliament, observers are waiting to see 1) whether Gajanayake will attempt to shield himself from prosecution by threatening to expose the Defense Secretary; 2) whether the UNP will release the information it alleges to have gathered that connects Gajanayake to Gothabaya; and 3) whether the UNP and SLFP will pursue their competing no-confidence motions. END SUMMARY.

ABDUCTIONS "MASTERMIND" ARRESTED

12. (C) On June 21, the CID arrested Nishantha Gajanayake, a retired Air Force Squadron Leader whose last assignment was as Executive Assistant to a former Sri Lanka Armed Forces Commander, on charges of masterminding abductions, extortions and extra-judicial killings. Among other crimes, Gajanayake is alleged to have personally carried out the abduction and killing of two Tamil Red Cross employees on June 1 (ref A). According to several Embassy sources, including Tamil National Alliance (TNA) Member of Parliament Suresh Premachandran (strictly protect), the two Tamil Red Cross employees were abducted and killed because Gajanayake recognized one of them as a former Tiger operative. Gajanayake apparently thought that the Red Cross employee also recognized him as he was talking to Karuna cadres in the lobby of a Colombo hotel. Gajanayake panicked and immediately orchestrated the abduction, which was carried out during the daytime at the Colombo main train station. Witnesses were able to record the license plate of the white van used in the abduction and provide descriptions of the abductors, including Gajanayake, who were posing as police officers.

13. (SBU) The GSL has publicly touted Gajanayake's arrest as evidence that it is serious about prosecuting human rights offenses. Defense spokesman Keheliya Rambukwella stated: "This clearly shows the bona fides of the Mahinda Rajapaksa administration." The Daily Mirror quoted an anonymous CID investigator stating that they had arrested Gajanayake -- the

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"mastermind" behind the "spate" of abductions, extortions and killings after collecting "enough evidence." The same CID investigator stated that Gajanayake worked in concert with a "terrorist group" to carry out the abductions, but failed to elaborate on which terrorist group was involved or on any additional suspects CID is investigating.

UNP ALLEGATIONS PARTIALLY VERIFIED

14. (C) On June 6, during an emergency session of Parliament to discuss the GSL's forced transport of hundreds of Tamils from Colombo, United National Party (UNP) parliamentarian Lakshman Seneviratne accused Gajanayake of working on behalf of Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa and in concert with Colombo Deputy-Inspector General of Police Rohan Abeywardene to orchestrate abductions (ref B). Seneviratne stated that Gajanayake arranged abductions and extra-judicial killings using Karuna cadres on orders from Gothabaya and with the assistance of police officers acting under Abeywardene's instructions. Although Seneviratne alleged that he has evidence to verify his accusations, the link between Gothabaya, Abeywardene and Gajanayake has not been verified. Likewise, the CID has not implicated the Karuna faction in Gajanayake's arrest, instead referring to a "terrorist group." Despite this, Seneviratne confided to us on June 21, shortly after news of Gajanayake's arrest was announced, that he is prepared to verify all of his allegations.

COMPETING NO-CONFIDENCE MOTIONS

15. (SBU) On June 18, the UNP filed a formal motion with the Speaker of Parliament seeking a vote of no confidence against defense spokesman and Minister of Foreign Employment, Promotion and Welfare Keheliya Rambukwella. The basis of the UNP's motion rests upon Rambukwella's statements to Parliament on June 7 that Tamils evicted from Colombo lodges left voluntarily. Two days later on June 9, Rambukwella sat with Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake as he publicly apologized on behalf of the GSL and acknowledged that Tamils were removed from Colombo against their will (ref E). The

UNP hopes to capitalized on Rambukwella's contradictions to force him from his ministerial position. Additionally, the UNP seeks to deal a political blow to the Rajapaksa administration after 17 UNP parliamentarians, including Rambukwella, crossed over to join the SLFP (ref F).

¶6. (C) On June 20, the SLFP counter-attacked by filing its own petition seeking a vote of no confidence against Seneviratne for allegedly distorting the truth about Gothabaya Rajapaksa's involvement with Gajanayake, Abeywardene, Karuna and abductions. Seneviratne confided to us on June 21 that he does not believe the SLFP will press forward with its no confidence motion against him. Instead, Seneviratne sees the SLFP's motion as a ploy to force the UNP to drop its motion against Rambukwella. Unlike Minister Rambukwella, Seneviratne has no official position to lose, even if the no confidence motion is sustained. He would still remain a member of Parliament.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: Gajanayake's arrest represents both a significant step forward in the administration's attempt to improve its human rights record and a potentially dangerous political move that could backfire on those closest to the President. If Gajanayake is indeed behind some of the abductions in Colombo, his arrest represents a strong move towards GSL transparency and accountability for human rights violations. However, if Seneviratne's allegations of

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Gajanayake's ties to the Rajapaksa administration are accurate, Gajanayake could seek to shield himself by revealing the culpability of those above him. Likewise, Seneviratne and the UNP find themselves in dangerous waters. Now that Gajanayake has been arrested on grounds that mirror Seneviratne's explosive allegations, the UNP will be pressured to prove that Gajanayake was working in concert with Gothabaya and Abeywardene. Although failure to do so would not carry any formal penalties against Seneviratne, it would discredit the UNP's increasingly aggressive criticism of the Rajapaksa administration.

BLAKE